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Percy Comes Under Vietcong Fire; Wife Is Flown to Safety

By TOM BUCKLEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 12—A helicopter quickly carried Mrs. Charles H. Percy to safety while her husband, the Senator from Illinois, and other civilians in his party were under Vietcong mortar and small-arms fire today at a hamlet five miles from the Cambodian border.

Senator Percy said that five mortar shells had been fired at his group, the closest landing within 15 feet.

As the shells landed, he said, the unarmed helicopter in which his group had traveled took off immediately, carrying Mrs. Percy, who had remained on board, to the Phuoclong Province capital, Songbe, about a mile away.

Mr. Percy and four companions, armed with a carbine and a revolver, spent 15 minutes under fire.

Group Visited Dakson

The attack took place as the Senator was visiting the deserted resettlement hamlet of Dakson, 90 miles northwest of Saigon.

The Vietcong massacred some 200 mountain tribespeople, mostly women and children, and abducted at least 500 during an attack on the hamlet last Tuesday.

"It was closer to action, I must say, than I got in three years of World War II," the Senator said at a previously arranged news conference a few hours after the incident.

Awaiting the helicopter's return, the 48-year-old Republican Senator, who has been mentioned as a possible Presidential or Vice Presidential candidate next year, sought shelter behind the razed native huts.

"I can assure you that I never got closer to the ground," Mr. Percy said, with a laugh.

One of his companions, Dennis Smith of Milton, Mass., a refugee expert in the United States mission, was carrying the party's only weapons. Keeping the carbine, he passed a .38-caliber revolver to the Senator.

Noting that it was more than 20 years since he had handled a gun, Mr. Percy, who was a Naval officer in World War II but did not see combat, said that he recalled shouting to Mr. Smith: "How does this thing operate? Is the safety on or off?"

As the five men — the other members of the party were Fred Ward of Look magazine; Kenneth Schmidt, a Chicago busi-



Associated Press Radiophoto

Senator Charles H. Percy, Illinois Republican, talking to newsmen in Saigon yesterday after rescue by helicopter.

nessman, and Scott Cohen, a former operative of the Central Intelligence Agency who has been Mr. Percy's foreign affairs adviser for four years—formed what was described as a defensive perimeter, a volley of shots struck the hut over their heads.

Hand Is Scratched

The Senator was scratched on the back of his right hand as he wriggled across a clearing on his stomach in search of shelter.

The stocky, unruffled Mr. Percy said that he had decided to visit the hamlet after inspecting the resettlement village at Laithieu, 20 miles north of Saigon. It was there that the inhabitants of Bensac were taken after their village was leveled last January.

The Percy party was traveling in a helicopter chartered from Air America, the airline established by the C.I.A. and used mainly to transport American civilian officials around South Vietnam.

The Senator, who noted that his group paid its own fare to

Vietnam, said that he did not ask for military transportation because he did not wish to interfere in any way with military activities.

It was also understood that he believed he would see more if he was unhampered by escorts, protocol and briefings. The Senator added that an unidentified Army officer had told the group that Dakson was "secure."

Elements of two Vietcong regiments have made at least a dozen attacks in the Songbe area in the last three weeks.

"It was my husband's idea to go there," said Mrs. Percy, with a hint of asperity. "Life is never dull when you're around him."

Replying to questions on

other topics, the Senator said that he opposed any broadening of the war, such as pursuit of the enemy into Cambodia or an invasion of North Vietnam.

Alluding to a remark made by Gov. George Romney after his tour of South Vietnam, Mr. Percy said that he had detected no attempt to "brainwash" him in his official briefings, but he noted that, as a politician, he did not get out of his way to point out his own problems and faults and he could hardly expect American officials here to do otherwise.

Regarding a negotiated settlement of the war, the Senator said that if progress could be made through the United Nations or a reconvening of the Geneva conference of 1954, an "all-Asian conference might be a desirable thing."

He added, "It is one of the doors that ought to be left open."

Mr. Percy, accompanied by the United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, conferred with President Nguyen Van Thieu for 40 minutes. The Senator said that they had discussed the desirability of reform in the Government, austerity in the capital and social justice for the countryside.

'I Wanted to See'

SAIGON, Dec. 12 (UPI) — Senator Percy, in an account of his experience under fire written for United Press International, said that he had wanted to visit Dakson because it was the scene of "the worst atrocity that has been committed in Vietnam."

"You hear of accidental bombings, problems created by our own forces on occasion," he said. "I wanted to see what has happened in that particular area."

He said that his helicopter circled the hamlet five or six times before landing and that there seemed to be no one in the area.

"So we took the helicopter in," he went on, "left Mrs. Percy in the helicopter, left the chopper blades going, and the five of us went out to see

the burned-out areas, to see some of the bunkers where women and children were discovered as a result of suffocation and so forth.

"AS we proceeded back to the helicopter, we took five mortar shells and about 15 rounds of ground fire. Fortunately, Dennis (Smith) did not have a .38-caliber snub-nosed pistol, which he passed to me. I don't know if we were in greater danger with me carrying a pistol, or whether it was the danger from the mortar shells."

Within 15 or 20 minutes, Senator Percy said, United States helicopters came to provide cover for them.

"I must say my wife was calm as can be about the experience," Senator Percy said. "She had her seat belt on when it [the helicopter] took off. We got in before any of us had a chance to put our seat belts on. We were just hanging on that thing with the open door."

"It was the most comforting

Pontiff Praises Leger On Missionary Decision

Special to The New York Times

ROME, Dec. 12—Pope Paul VI has expressed "gratitude" and "goodwill" to Paul-Emile Cardinal Léger, the former Archbishop of Montreal, who left his diocese to become a missionary to lepers in Africa.

The Vatican published today the text of the Pontiff's letter, dated Dec. 1, to the Cardinal, who arrived in Dakar, Senegal, on his way to Cotonou, Dahomey. He will spend six months in study in Dahomey, Senegal, Togo and Cameroon before making final plans for his work.

In the letter the Pope praised the Cardinal for his devotion to his diocese and expressed gratitude to a man, who by his activity during the Ecumenical Council and the Synod of Bishops "contributed with so much zeal to the 'updating' of the church."

feeling I've ever had—seeing three or four of those things hovering around as ours came in."

Percy's Request, U.S. Says

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12—A Department of Defense spokesman said today that the unscheduled stopover at Dakson was apparently made at Senator Percy's request. No United States military or South Vietnamese Army personnel were accompanying the Senator on the visit, the spokesman said.

According to information received here, United States authorities in Saigon were unaware of the Senator's visit to Dakson until after he had landed there.

No broad rules for restricted areas have been laid down by the United States command. Security considerations are a prime factor in determining travel in South Vietnam, United States officials said, but this is decided locally from day to day, reflecting the situation on the day of intended travel.

Similarly, there is no overall policy on whether civilian visitors can carry or use weapons. Officials said that this was a matter for personal discretion on the spot.

There was no official comment on Mrs. Percy's presence.

Moro Wins Confidence Vote

ROME, Dec. 12 (AP)—Premier Aldo Moro's Government won a vote of confidence in the Senate tonight after the Communists sought for the second time in less than a week to increase Italy's 1968 budget expenditures, this time for pensions. The Government obtained 143 votes, 18 more than the required majority. The Communists and other leftists mustered 84 votes.

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